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Partial Record of Meeting of Department of State Representatives with Joint Chiefs of Staff

Pentagon Building
August 6, 1954

Subject: Plane Incidents off Hainan Island

Mr. Murphy referred to the plane incidents off Hainan Island on July 23 and July 26. The Department was interested in getting from the Navy and the Air Force a detailed account of both incidents, properly documented and notarized, for possible use in case the issue should come before some international body.

Admiral Carney said that the Navy had prepared a chronological account of the incidents. A copy of this account had been sent to State. However, the evidence of the pilots was not in affidavit form and it was probably not as comprehensive as desired by the Department. He said that an effort would be made to obtained a more complete and formal record, in line with the Department's wishes.

Mr. Murphy referred to the anxiety which has been caused among commercial airlines operating in the vicinity of Hainan Island as a result of these incidents. He asked Mr. McConaughy to give the particulars.

Mr. McConaughy said that certain airlines, particularly, Pan American Airways, a Thai airline with headquarters in Bangkok, and CAT, based in Formosa, were understood to be concerned at the possible continued danger to their planes operating in the general area of Hainan. Some of them had asked for guidance as to measures which they might take to reduce the risk.

General Twining said that a sea-air Rescue Command functioned in the area and would endeavor to assist any commercial plane in the area in case of need. He pointed out that neither the Air Force or the Navy could provide escorts for commerical planes. He said that he could only suggest that the commercial planes stay strictly in the prescribed air lanes, giving the island of Hainan a wide berth; and that if possible they avoid flying directly over or near Communist ships. He said that the Communists were very sensitive about observation of their shipping movements, and that it would be prudent to avoid any appearance of observing Communist shipping.

In response to a question from Mr. Murphy, Admiral Carney confirmed that US planes still maintain a surveillance of shipping in the general area. An effort was made to establish the identity of every ship in the area. He pointed out that this was done to ships of every nationality. It was not limited to Communist shipping. There was no discrimination involved, and there was no violation of international law since the surveillance was carried out over the high seas.

Mr. Murphy

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Mr. Murphy and Mr. McConaughy referred to the Soviet note of protest, dated August 4, against the reconnaissance activities of American planes, following the Polish protest of last week against alleged firing by American planes on a Polish merchant vessel on July 26. Mr. Murphy said that he did not know any basis in international law for the Soviet protest, since the planes undoubtedly were not guilty of any territorial violation. Mr. McConaughy said that he thought that the Soviets based their protest on the fact that the planes allegedly "buzzed" the Soviet ships, flying low and making passes at them. It was agreed that the Soviet protest was not well founded. The Joint Chiefs indicated that the surveillance activities would be continued.

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